

Testimony

Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Maura O'Connor and I am Professor and Program Coordinator of Graphic Design and Director of the Hans Weiss Newspace Gallery at Manchester Community College which advances academic, economic, civic, personal and cultural growth by providing comprehensive, innovative and affordable learning opportunities to diverse populations. We are a learning-centered community committed to access, excellence and relevance.

I am here today to testify in support of HB 5300, *An Act Requiring Legislative Approval For the Merger or Closing of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities and Prohibiting the Consolidation of the Regional-Technical Colleges*. This bill provides necessary legislative oversight of any merger within the CSCU System, a power that the Legislature used to hold. Oversight is needed. In order to demonstrate a financial savings, the System is cutting from the bottom level of staff while adding to the top layer of management, creating a staffing crisis at the colleges.

Prohibiting CSCU from moving forward with the consolidation sends a powerful message that Connecticut is willing to keep the community colleges strong for our neediest students by protecting the jobs that directly serve our students. The Community Colleges are understaffed in departments that directly serve students such as IT while CSCU had to build a building to house all the highly paid administrators that won't meet with a single student. Understaffing and early retirements without replacements have made addressing student needs in digital technology courses extremely difficult.

System officials first discussed the consolidation as a plan to save. When there was pushback, then and only then did they begin to say that it would also help students. However, any positive benefits from the consolidation, such as seamless transfer, can be done without merging the twelve colleges. This is nothing but a restructuring that adds many new administrators while cutting staff that works directly with students.

Help protect the Community Colleges. The students who attend are overwhelmingly from Connecticut and will stay in Connecticut to live and work. Community College students are majority black and brown, working class students. Real equity would be giving these students every opportunity to succeed by investing more in their education, not trying to save money by cutting the staff and resources that directly serve them.

Thank you,

Maura O'Connor